earlier of these meetings represented a new era in the work of the association, the meetings of which had been suspended during the war. There had been an informal meeting at Buffalo in 1864, attended by 79 persons, and a meeting the following year at Burlington was attended by 73. At the time of the meeting in 1868 the membership of the association was 428 and there were 259 in attendance. The sessions were held in the assembly hall of the Y. M. C. A. and the Baptist church, the meeting being held under the auspices of the citizens rather than of any educational or scientific body.

The meeting of 1908 was held at the University of Chicago with an attendance of 723 members, and it was estimated that, counting members of the affiliated societies, there were some 2,000 scientific men in attendance. Dr. William H. Welch, of the Johns Hopkins University, gave the presidential address; Professor Edward L. Nichols, of Cornell University, presided, and the president elected was Professor T. C. Chamberlin, of the University of Chicago. It was one of the most notable meetings of the association that has been held, and it may be expected that the meeting to be held at the end of December will make new advances in scientific organization, in scientific research and in the appreciation and support of science by the general public.

PROBLEMS OF A NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

AN interchange of delegates between the American and British Associations has been planned, and a joint meeting of the two associations on the common ground of Canada could be arranged with advantage both to science and to international friendship. The British Association, founded in 1831, was a model for ours, and we still have much to learn from it. For example, it is doubtful whether the addresses of the president and vice-president of the American Association always maintain as high an average standard of style, proportion and general interest as those presented at Cardiff, parts of which have been printed in this journal.

There may also be faults that the British and American Assocation share and, in so far as this is the case, the vigorous criticism of the conduct of the British Association that has been printed in *Nature* and other English journals since the Cardiff meeting should be of interest here as well as there. Indeed it must be admitted that the failure of the association to keep in touch with the general public—which is the principal charge against the British Association—is even more obvious in the United States. There is, however, this difference that while the English press and the people still pay more attention to the scientific work of the association and treat with greater consideration men engaged in research, there is a tendency for the two countries to reach a common level. Formerly the London *Times* gave whole pages daily for a week to the British Association, while now the space is reduced to a column or two and the topics treated are likely to be education, economics and the like. It seems that the same decrease in interest, especially in the more serious aspects of scientific work, is shown at the place of meeting. Still, it is the case that the local committee at Cardiff spent about $7,500 in entertaining the association, which the Chicago committee would probably regard as beyond the resources of that rich city.

Some of the comments regardng

the British Association are as follows:

I think that our "British Association" is in an unhealthy condition owing to the attempt made by it—not deliberately, but by constitutional looseness of purpose—to combine the features of a friendly picnic and smoking debate with the work of a national conference dealing (under the disadvantage of public ignorance and journalistic inaccuracy) with great questions of national importance. A choice must be made between "picnic" and "conference." I should prefer the picnic. —E. RAY LANKESTER.

Unless the British Association becomes democratic and acts as a real bond of union between scientific men and the thinking public, rather than as a periodic platform for personages, it does not seem to fulfil any function worth continuing. The public application of science is a totally different thing from applied science. This scientific synthesis and the direction of the unique mental attitude, induced only by the actual discovery of new knowledge, to the conduct of public affairs are the real and peculiar functions of the association if it is to regain its national position. Curved space, isotopes, and the economics of life on the floor of the ocean are topics of great interest to hundreds of the public. The standards of truth which science has set up, and the elevation of its pursuit above sophistry, chicanery, and the monotonous motives of self-interest, inspire the imagination of hundreds of thousands. The British Association seems to be attacked by senile paralysis just as a belief in science and in the power of its methods is arising in the world phœnix-like from the ashes of its old self.—FREDERICK SODDY.

Your criticism of the British Association, that it fails to touch our national life, is most opportune; but whereas you imply merely that it is decadent, to me it seems to be practically defunct. An active worker on its behalf in the past, I have little hope of its resuscitation and doubt if it can ever again fulfil the desires of its early promoters, who undoubtedly held its primary function to be that of advancing public appreciation of scientific discovery. I have always deplored our failure to appeal to the public. Seemingly, the spirit of sacrifice is gone out of science; strange to say, the herd instinct is altogether wanting in our society, so uncontrolled is our individuality. The assumed author of "The Beggar's Opera," after remarking of his characters, "There's not an honourable man among them, nor an honest woman," proceeds to say, "but they are all human." So are the present exploiters of the British Association, though were it not human to be selfish some might even dub them inhuman on account of the narrowness of their outlook and their disregard of public needs.—HENRY E. ARMSTRONG.

These are the more extreme criticisms. Letters and articles in defense of the association have also appeared and the honorary secretaries, Professors J. L. Myers and H. H. Turner have prepared a statement answering criticisms and outlining plans for the future work of the association.

THE ORGANIZATION OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH UNDER THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

OUR federal government has more scientific men in its bureaus and devotes larger sums to scientific work than any other nation. An immense amount of useful work is accomplished, but individual initiative is likely to be submerged by routine. It may, therefore, be worth while to note how the British Government has met the situation during and since the war period.

The last report of the Committee of the Privy Council for Scientific and Industrial Research contains an account by Sir William McCormick of its activities since its foundation in 1915. According to an abstract in the *Spectator* the program which has been elaborated by the advisory council during these five years classes its functions under four main heads. First comes the encouragement of individual workers at research. The special claims made by the needs of the war practically denuded the universities of research workers. Now that peace has returned other dangers have arisen. On the one hand, the universities are overcrowded with students, and the demands of teaching